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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a methods course block that combines several basic education courses and provides gradual increases in student teaching time. The course contains the methods instruction for music, science, language arts/reading, social studies, and physical education. The class meets on campus for instruction three to four weeks at the beginning, teaches in primary classrooms for two weeks, returns to campus for mid-term examinations and further instruction for three or four weeks, enters upper elementary classrooms for three weeks, and finally returns to campus for review, evaluation, and finals. The course is taught by a team of four or five professors. Physical education and music specialists teach and supervise their subject areas. Professors with specialties in elementary curriculum teach the language arts/reading and the content fields of science and social studies. Each professor supervises both areas in the practicum. School administrators, teachers, and students indicate the course is a beneficial experience. Teachers can observe newer teaching techniques and content first hand or meet to discuss problems with university professors. Although there are problems because of the time involved for both professors and students, course evaluations and observations suggest combining methods courses allows enough time for a lengthy student teaching experience. (Author/JK)

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A PRACTICUM APPROACH TO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES THROUGH A METHODS BLOCK STRUCTURE

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Scheduling Difficulties

Scheduling social studies methods courses in the elementary teacher education curriculum has become increasingly difficult. Near hysteria over reading and other so-called "basics" has placed tremendous demands upon legislators, teacher certification agencies, and teacher educators to emphasize these "basics" to the detriment of content fields. Louisiana, for example, now requires nine hours of reading methods and has no requirement for methods in either science or social studies. Education departments which value learning and teaching in content areas, and insist upon some methodology, have problems placing such courses in the over-burdened elementary curriculum. Additional dilemmas arise from the felt need to include more practicum in methods courses. The Department of Education at Southeastern Louisiana University has developed a methods block structure which offers one solution to these problems.

Southeastern's Block Structure

At Southeastern a block structure has been evolving that combines many basic education courses and provides gradual increases in practicum time so that the final experience of student teaching is not an abrupt confrontation with children. A model is shown in Figure 1. This plan has also permitted a complete array of methods instruction. In this paper we are concerned only with the last block, Education 410, taken in the senior year prior to student teaching, with particular attention to social studies.

Classroom Instruction

Block I
Education 202 -- 3 Semester Hours Instroduction to Education Historical and Philosophical Foundations
Block II
Education Psychology -- 6 Semester Hours Psychological and Sociological Foundation for Teaching
Block III
Education 321 -- 6 Semester Hours Elementary Curriculum and Instruction Methods in Reading and Mathematics
Block IV
Education 410 -- 10 Semester Hours Elementary Curriculum and Instruction Methods in Language Arts, Sciences, Social Studies, Music and Evaluation
Block V
Education 421 -- 14 Semester Hours Elementary Teaching Professional Semester

Practicum

Figure 3. Elementary Curriculum

Program Description

Time Table and Overall Organization

Education 410, ten hours credit, labled simply Elementary Curriculum and Instruction, contains the methods instruction for music, science, language arts/reading, and social studies. Actually, there are twelve hours with physical education included. (P. E. is listed separately for administrative reasons.) The course meets daily, four hours three days per week from 8:00 to 12:00, and three hours the remaining two, 9:00 to 12:00. When the class is on-site with field experiences the schedule is 8:30 to 12:00 daily. As shown in Figure 2, the class meets on campus for instruction three to four weeks at the beginning, teaches in primary classrooms for two weeks, returns to campus for mid-term examinations and further instruction for three or four weeks, enters upper elementary classrooms for three weeks, and finally returns to campus for review, roundup and finals. Precise scheduling is dependent upon the schools' calendars.

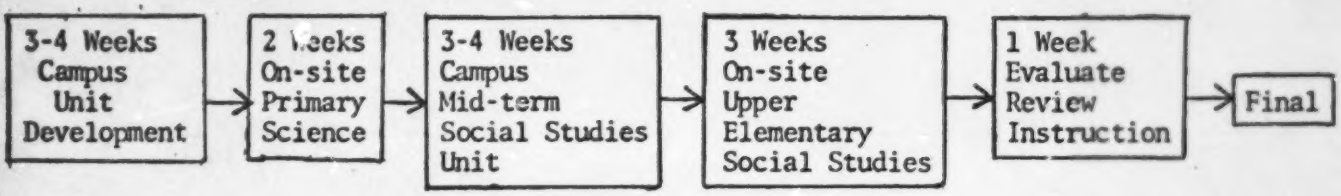

Figure 2. Semester Schedule

Personnel

Education 410, with attached P. E., is taught by a team of four (five if the class is over sixty) University professors. Physical education and music specialists teach and supervise their subject areas. Department of Education professors with specialties in elementary curriculum teach the language arts/reading and the content fields of science and social studies. Each professor supervises both areas in the practicum. These Department of Education persons operate as a close team and are responsible for the organization of the course. In the initial on-campus instruction period and the interim instruction period, each education professor has an hour or more daily for instruction. Music and P. E. specialists teach approximately three days per week, but they also team closely so that there is intermingling of times and teaching.

Content Teaching in the Initial Period

The professor responsible for content methods utilizes the first part of the course to teach unit construction which will apply to both science and social studies. Various sections of the unit model (modified Tyler) help develop ideas and skills such as: the nature and utilization of generalizations and concepts; techniques of moving students from recall and observation to higher cognitive skills; rationalizing curriculum selection; recognizing the role of the child's cognitive development; and developing learning experiences of several types. During this time, students are constructing a one week science unit, usually around a single concept or generalization.

Practicum Organization

During the practicum, on-site in public schools, teams of four or five students enter a classroom which they "borrow" from the regular teacher for two weeks, two hours daily. During that daily two hours, students teach music, P. E., language arts/reading, and science as shown in Figure 3.

8:30 - 9:00	Whole section. Consultation. Planning. Lesson plans from previous day returned.
9:00 - 9:30	Teams in classrooms. Language Arts/Reading
9:30 - 10:00	Teams in classrooms. Social Studies.
10:00 - 10:15	Recess
10:15 - 10:25	Teams in classrooms. Current events.
10:25 - 11:00	Teams. Music or physical education.
11:00 - 11:50	Whole section. Write evaluations on lesson plans. Lesson plans turned in. Professors advise and assist.

Figure 3. Typical Daily Schedule - Upper Elementary

Each team decides which unit(s) they will use, selecting from among those written by their group. Each team member has a small group of children within the class to whom the science and language arts are taught. The team plans together generally, but each student makes his own daily lesson plans. P. E. and music are usually taught in a whole class setting.

Practicum Supervision

Each of the two (three) methods' professors takes a section of twenty to thirty students to a public school, selected by negotiating with principals and teachers. Different socio-economic levels are chosen for the two experiences, and there are other selection factors such as distance from the University.

Methods students gather each morning at 8:30 for planning and general preparation. Professors are on hand to assist with the process. From 9:00 to 11:00 the regular classroom teacher is relieved of her duties and the team takes over. Regular teachers may stay in the room or leave. University professors then assume the responsibility of supervising the five or six classrooms that have been "borrowed". Language arts/reading and science are observed. The music and P. E. specialists come in part time to observe the teaching of their subjects. At 11:00 the whole student section meets together again to write evaluations of their lessons. Lesson plans are handed in, to be marked (comments, not grades), and returned the next morning. Students are helped with problems observed in the classroom and are given further assistance with planning. Music and P. E. persons attend planning sessions.

The pattern explained above also applies to the second practicum except that three weeks are spent at the upper elementary level, with social studies being taught in place of science, and with P. E. and music being taught on alternate days to allow more time per subject.

Content Teaching - Second On-Campus Period

In between the two practicums social studies is the area of concentration. The basic unit model has been taught and utilized so there is no need for repetition except to relate each section to social studies. More time can be spent on the subject matter per se with ideas, skills, and learning experiences specific to social studies. Also, most students require more background knowledge in social sciences other than history and geography. Students must write a three week unit for social studies and are encouraged to utilize the more atypical materials and ideas.

Advantages of the Block Structure

There are a number of advantages accruing from the block course described above. These are as follows:

1. Combining method courses allows enough time to go out in a real school situation for a lengthy practicum.
2. Students get a realistic teaching experience in schools of different socio-economic levels where they can personally experience the impact of the institution.
3. Students get constant, direct supervision in the classroom setting by the same people who taught the methodology. There is great continuity, and reality to converting theory into practice.
4. The immediate use of campus taught methodology assures better retention and further development of skills, knowledge, and attitudes involved.
5. Basic methodology such as unit development, lesson plan, classroom management techniques, higher cognitive questioning skills, and development of curriculum from concepts and generalizations can be taught once and developed later as it applies to various subjects. Much time is saved.
6. Students get a more wholistic view of elementary curriculum as they are encouraged to relate the various subject matters taught. This is especially beneficial to reading as it occurs in the content areas.
7. University professors stay in close touch with classroom realities of the public schools. There is little possibility of "Ivory Tower" teaching in this context.
8. The long period of close contact in somewhat stressful situations promotes excellent communication between students, and between professors and students.
9. Schools are used only once per academic year, minimizing their disruptions and thereby assuring cooperation.

Advantages for the Schools

School administrators and teachers indicate that 410 is a beneficial experience. Teachers can observe newer teaching techniques and content first hand. There are opportunities to discuss problems with University professors, or, time may be used to meet with other teachers concerning school matters. The program provides teacher planning time, a rare commodity in the elementary school.

Children usually welcome 410 students and thrive under their direction. For many, this is the only time they have music, P. E., and so much personalized instruction.

Problems

The structure of Education 410 creates some problems. Professors involved must expend a tremendous amount of time and energy. Block teaching leaves little time for much else. For example, the content person may need to evaluate and help develop as many as 120 units per semester in addition to preparing and administering examinations, giving lectures, advising, and reading lesson plans. Students also find 410 a heavy load and can rarely handle more than one other course.

Professors accustomed to typical methods courses must adopt a new style of teaching. Decisions must be made about what to teach on campus and what to emphasize on-site. Teaching is condensed and intensive for short periods of time. The text assumes a different role, and most methods texts are inappropriate. Each subject area is covered in less depth than would be possible in a regular methods course, but it is felt that the worth of the practicum outweighs this deficit.

Evaluation

The Education 410 methods block is probably the most dreaded and loved course in the elementary curriculum. A few students cannot take the pace, the stress, and most likely could not succeed in the real world of classroom teaching. These students either drop or make decisions about proceeding in special areas such as speech. Most finish the course with a great deal of excitement about teaching, but no illusions. Student evaluations and our observations

suggest that considerable learning takes place, much of it in realms where measurement is not available. Likewise, supervising teachers tell us that these students are more proficient than those who took the standard methods courses. Most students are finding employment and are considered well prepared by area school systems. Time, and a more deliberate effort on our part, will help provide a more valid assessment.

A part of the final examination requires the students to state their rationale for including social studies in the elementary curriculum. The eloquence and sincerity of these statements leads one to believe that the social studies curriculum is safe and sound in the hands of Southeastern graduates.

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